WHEN DID DOG GUIDES DISCOVER AMERICA?

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When Did Dog Guides Discover America?

Dogs may have guided blind as far back as 13th Century

The Seeing Eye, Inc., America's first dog guide school, celebrated its 50th anniversary January 29.

While there is evidence that dogs had been used to lead the blind in other parts of the world on an informal basis for centuries, the practice didn't become formalized in America until after the idea entered the country between the covers of a 5¢ magazine, the *Saturday Evening Post.*

The article was written by Dorothy Eustis, who had been training and breeding dogs for various functions in the Swiss army for years in Vevey, Switzerland. In the article she described work she had observed in Potsdam, Germany of shepherd dogs being trained to lead blind German World War I veterans. There is evidence that the trainers there took their ideas, in part at least, from a book written in 1819 which des-

Jack Humphrey, The Seeing Eye's first training director and Dorothy Eustis, who observed dog guides being trained in Germany and wrote about it for an American magazine, talk with Morris Frank, whose idea it was to bring dog guides to the U.S. At right, the Seeing Eye breeds many of its own dogs and places them with 4-H families to accustom the dogs to a family atmosphere.

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cribes the training of a dog to lead a blind person. One expert has said that the easy manner of the description indicates that this training procedure had been thought through and possibly used by someone from whom that author got his information.

In fact, a dog is shown acting as a guide for a blind man in a 13th century Chinese scroll painting indicating the existence, if not the organized use, of dogs for guides even then.

The *Post* article inspired 20-year-old Morris Frank, who had been blind since the age of sixteen, to write Eustis from his Nashville, Tennessee home telling her that he wanted one of those dogs. Showing vision, Frank said, in part, "We can set up an instruction center in this country to give all those here who want it a chance at a new life."

He went to Switzerland where he was matched with a gray Shepherd dog trained there by Humphrey. After he was taught to work with his dog, "Buddy," Frank came back to New York and, on the way home, stopped in nearly every major city between there and Nashville on a one-man promotion tour to convince America that the dog guide was practical and useful.

His first big chance to do that was for a group of reporters in New York City. Frank and Buddy crossed West Street, at that time the busiest street in America's largest city. At least one sighted reporter had to take a cab to cross the street and several simply gave up.

When Frank returned to Nashville and set up The Seeing Eye, Inc., he

found that many blind persons were inquiring about getting dog guides. Nevertheless, they were having trouble convincing major organizations and agencies of the merit of the idea.

As Jack Humphrey, Eustis' chief trainer, was coming over to Nashville to begin teaching people to train the dogs, he paid a fateful visit to the fourth person responsible for The Seeing Eye as it is today. Willi Ebeling, a retired import dealer, had become a good friend of Humphrey's through their mutual interest in breeding and training German Shepherds. Ebeling was so intrigued with the program that Ebeling contributed the use of his New Jersey home for the new school's headquarters. The Seeing Eye is still using Ebeling's home.

With a lot of work on the part of Frank Eustis, Humphrey and Ebeling, a school grew in New Jersey which has since trained over 4,500 men and women to use dog guides. These people have entered over 100 fields of endeavor.

The Seeing Eye's first dogs were German Shepherds. Today it still uses Shepherds, but also uses Labradors, Golden Retrievers and mixed breeds. Since 1941, The Seeing Eye has placed three-month-old puppies with volunteer 4-H families in New Jersey and Pennsylvania where the dogs are raised in a family atmosphere until the age of 14 months, at which time they are sent to the school for training.

It takes three months to train a

Leader Dogs For The Blind

Another important provider of dog guides for blind individuals is Leader Dogs for the Blind in Rochester, Michigan.

Established in 1939, 40 years ago this year, by a Lions club there, it has since provided over 5,000 blind individuals with Leader Dogs, a copyrighted title.

Information distributed by the Leader Dog school indicate there are 450,000 blind persons in the U.S. with approximately 40,000 additional persons, the school's information says, who would benefit by the use of dog guides.

While the Leader Dogs school serves blind persons across the U.S. and in several countries, nearly half of last year's 254 graduates were from Michigan, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Canada.

Each leader dog costs the school $4,500. This includes training for the dog and room and board for both dogs and the blind persons being taught to use their new dog guides.

While most of the money to operate Leader Dogs for the Blind comes from the Lions Club, it also comes from various other public and private agencies as well as from individuals. The individual receiving the dog is charged nothing.

For information on their program, write Leader Dogs for the Blind, 1039 South Rochester Road, Rochester, Michigan 48063.

dog, a month to teach the blind person to use the dog, and at least two years of apprenticeship to develop a qualified instructor. The instructors train both the dogs and the person who will be using the dog.

They drill the dogs in steering their future masters clear of dangerous obstacles, and getting them through traffic. The dog's "final exam" is a walk through town with the blindfolded instructor. When ready, the dog and its rigid collar, a vital link in communication between dog and master, are introduced to the new blind master. The dog's new master is then trained in using the dog.

The first dog guide costs the user $150, and each subsequent dog after that costs the user $50. The fee includes round trip transportation from the individual's home to The Seeing Eye school and back, and board for a month at the school. The school assumes the obligation to supply dog guides as long as the person is physically able to use one.

The Seeing Eye has a staff of over 70 persons, serves more than 200 blind individuals a year and has an annual budget of $2 million. Funds for operating the school come basically from contributions. The school receives no governmental aid of any kind.

For information on The Seeing Eye, write The Seeing Eye, Inc., Office of Public Information, One Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020.

Guide Dog Foundation For The Blind

Still another major dog guide school is the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind.

Located in Forest Hills, New York, the Foundation has supplied 1,000 guide dogs since its founding in 1946. Like The Seeing Eye school, the Foundation breeds at least some of its own dogs and receives others as donations. The dogs, like those of The Seeing Eye, are raised in "foster" homes until old enough to be trained.

The Foundation charges the students nothing and receives no government grants. All of its funds come from private contributions.

For information on their program, write: Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, 109-19 72nd Ave., Forest Hills, N.Y. 11375.

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